

A Story to Tell: Experiences of Fraternity Members (A Phenomenological Study)

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ABSTRACT

Fraternity membership often provides students with a sense of community, brotherhood, and networking opportunities that can enhance their social and professional lives. This study explored the experiences of students with fraternity membership in Ozamiz City. The study used a qualitative approach using phenomenological study Research Design. Seven fraternity members from Ozamiz City who encountered a lot of personal and educational challenges being a member of a fraternity were considered as participants of the study. They were selected based on the following criteria: (1) member of a fraternity (2) who resides in Ozamiz City (3) students who encountered personal and educational challenges (4) willingness to participate. An interview was used to gather data. Analysis of the responses was done using Husserl's transcendental phenomenological study. Results generated four themes: Balancing academic and fraternity responsibilities, financial challenges, Emotional and social support, Personal growth and development, demonstrating the diversity of student engagement in fraternities. Every participant gave a different story that demonstrated how they managed their personal and academic responsibilities in the fraternity setting. Recommendations include fraternity organizations that may foster inclusive and supportive environments, encouraging strong support networks among members to enhance emotional well-being and academic success.

Keywords: Brotherhood; Educational challenges; Emotional well-being; Engagement; Membership; Personal challenges; Phenomenological study; Personal growth; Responsibilities; Social integration.

1. Introduction

Fraternity can be defined as the trait or condition of being brotherly, highlighting the notion of a close-knit community among people or groups (Ablaza et al, 2022; Phillips & Rogers, 2021; Skorska & Bogaert, 2020). Fraternities are social organizations or groups that are primarily formed by male members to develop a sense of brotherhood and camaraderie. Fraternities are frequently based on common ideals, hobbies, or college affiliations (Garcia & Duran, 2021; Puyol, 2019; Kropáček, 2021). Fraternities in the Philippines are primarily regulated by the Anti-Hazing Law, Republic Act No. 8049. This law, also known as the "Anti-Hazing Act of 1995," prohibits hazing and regulates initiation rites in fraternities, sororities, and other organizations. It mandates stricter rules and regulations to ensure the safety and welfare of individuals joining these groups and imposes penalties on those found guilty of hazing-related activities. The law was enacted to prevent hazing-related injuries and deaths in fraternities and similar organizations (Lawphil, 2023).

Advantages of fraternity are to unite people's interests, morals, and behavior to build strong social relationships (Kućko, 2020; Russo & Tava, 2023; Carbajo-Núñez, 2022). These organizations often engage in charitable work or volunteer work in their communities, which teaches members responsibility (Houge, 2022; Garcia, 2020; Lanuza, 2022). In fraternities, brotherhood is very important since members make strong bonds and support one another through school and life in general (DeSantis, 2020; Garcia & Duran, 2021). Fraternity houses host several parties and activities, giving them a great setting for creating memories and learning valuable life lessons. It is possible to develop personally, become a leader, and feel completely at home by joining a fraternity, and these ties may last a lifetime.

Difficulties of a fraternity such as educational pressure, time commitment, hazing, or even alcohol and substance abuse. The educational pressure can make it difficult to balance the interpersonal and organizational duties of a fraternity alongside the scholastic expectations of college (Sasso et al., 2019; Ispa-Landa & Thomas, 2023; Boykin, 2023). The time commitment, joining a fraternity frequently involves a sizable time commitment. This entails showing up to meetings, taking part in activities, and occasionally even residing in the fraternity home. This may make it more difficult for a student to participate in additional extracurricular pursuits or hold down part-time employment. Due to the daily commitments required for fraternity tasks, some students could find it difficult to retain their grades. While hazing it persists in certain chapters despite being against the law and being outlawed by many colleges and national sorority organizations. Lastly, fraternities are sometimes associated with a culture of heavy drinking and partying. This can lead to alcohol abuse and risky behavior, including driving under the influence. The fraternity might hamper members' educational success if it promotes an atmosphere that places a higher value on social interactions than academics and lacks resources for addressing members' particular problems (Dougé, 2020; Maguvhe, 2023). The fraternity's ideals, procedures, and degree of dedication from both its leadership and members ultimately determine how it will affect educational achievement and personal obstacles. Therefore, a well-rounded and encouraging fraternity may prove crucial in boosting each member's educational successes and helping them get over any personal obstacles they might have while participating throughout the fraternity (Copeland, 2023; Tolliver et al., 2020).

The study explored the experiences of fraternity membership. Fraternities contribute significantly to the development of lasting relationships and a feeling of family that lasts long after graduation in addition to academic success (Donati, 2021; Francis, 2020). An intricate equilibrium among social activities and curricular responsibilities is needed because fraternity affiliation may bring intellectual and personal difficulties that have an important effect on an individual's educational journey (Garcia, 2020; Gibson, 2021). For success in their academic endeavors, while taking advantage of the advantages of great life, fraternity members frequently need strong time management, interpersonal skills, as well as encouragement systems (Sferrazzo, 2021; Susemihl, 2021). Furthermore, dealing with the educational and personal difficulties that come with fraternity affiliation can promote resilience and development as individuals, giving students useful life abilities for later career endeavour. These interactions can also deepen into pieces of brotherhood, building a community for encouragement that endures past years of higher education and connects people for the rest of their lives (Waterman et al., 2020; Master et al., 2022).

1.1. Study Objectives

The following are the objectives of this study: (i) Determine the participant's profile, (ii) Investigate the challenges encountered by the participants as a member of the fraternity, and (iii) Identify the coping mechanism strategy of the participants in dealing with the challenges.

2. Material and Methods

The study was conducted using a qualitative research method and a phenomenological methodology. The study aimed to explore the experiences encountered by the Bahay Pag-aso personnel. Moustakas' transcendental

phenomenology was used in the process of interpreting data from research participants to obtain meaningful themes. This study was conducted in Ozamiz City. It is a third-class component city in Misamis Occidental, Northern Mindanao, Philippines.

The researcher's own custom interview guide was employed in the study. Before distributing the interview guide among the participants, the adviser already reviews it, and the panel members were additionally examining the document and accept it. There are questions to be asked designed to help the researcher learn more about the difficulties fraternity members face while they pursue their academic and private objectives in college. Upon obtaining the necessary permissions, the researchers set an appointment with the identified participants and propose the schedule of the interview.

Furthermore, the researchers informed the participants that the conversation will be recorded and will assure them that all their responses in the interview will be kept with utmost confidentiality. After that, the data will be analyzed and will be presented.

The participants were chosen under the following criteria: 1) college student; 2) member of a fraternity; and 3) willing to participate. The participants were chosen willingly depending on their willingness to participate in the requested action. By reading and explaining to the participants the terms of conditions specified in the informed consent, the participants were helped to comprehend the nature of their involvement.

In the entire process of the study, the welfare of the participants was the priority of the researcher. Privacy and confidentiality were always observed, particularly the names of the participants and other information unnecessary to the study. The researcher adhered to the guidelines set by the Republic Act No. 10173 known as the "Data Privacy Act of 2012". Through these, the researcher ensured the privacy and confidentiality of the qualitative research. Further, informed consent to the participants before conducting the interviews was provided. This consent was free of technical terms to avoid miscommunication, which gives the participants a clear view of the benefits they may obtain and their contribution to the study. The researcher informed them to read thoroughly the statement and agreement in the informed consent.

For clarity, the researchers loudly read the information from the informed consent and explain the content in the local dialect or language they can understand directly. The researchers then distribute copies of the informed consent after the participants have signed the form.

3. Results and Discussions

This part presented the different themes that were derived from the different responses of the participants of the study during the conduct of the interview.

It is evident in the study that all of the participants were male with an average age ranging from 20 to 27 years old. Further, based on the responses of the participants of the study, there were four (4) themes identified such as: (1) Balancing academic and fraternity responsibilities, (2) Financial Constraints, (3) Emotional and Social Support, and (4) Personal growth and development.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Name	Age	Occupation	Gender
P1	22	Student	Male
P2	26	Student	Male
P3	25	Student	Male
P4	24	Student	Male
P5	20	Student	Male
P6	22	Student	Male
P7	26	Student	Male

3.1. Balancing Academic and Fraternity Responsibilities

Balancing academic pursuits with fraternity commitments is a dynamic challenge many students face. Juggling rigorous coursework alongside fraternity responsibilities requires adept time management and prioritization skills. Participant 1 emphasizes the importance of establishing a balanced schedule between academic and fraternity commitments. Participant 2 highlights effective time management as key to balancing academics and a job. Participant 3 underscores the necessity of discipline and careful planning for success in both domains. Participant 4 discusses fitting fraternity activities around academic responsibilities. Participant 5 attributes their success to prioritizing education through time management, confirming paternal advice. Participant 6 mentions the efficiency gained from setting precise goals and deadlines. Participant 7 echoes Participant 5's sentiment, emphasizing the importance of time management and parental guidance in achieving academic and personal objectives.

A shared statement by the participant:

"The secret is to strike a balance between your study and your fraternity. Establish a schedule that will allow you to attend to both studying and your fraternity activities." (Participant 1)

"The secret to balancing the demands of my academics and job is effective time management." (Participant 2)

"I knew that this would take discipline and careful planning, but I was determined to be successful in both." (Participant 3)

"I try to fit fraternity meetings, activities, and other obligations around my academic in order to handle this." (Participant 4)

"I just did what my father said and prioritized my education through time management so that I could be responsible enough to achieve my objectives." (Participant 5)

"Establishing precise goals and due dates enables me to manage these additional duties with efficiency." (Participant 6)

"I prioritized my education through time management, following my father's advice to ensure I could responsibly achieve my objectives." (Participant 7)

Balancing academic pursuits and fraternity responsibilities presents a multifaceted challenge, one that intersects with broader themes of time management and prioritization in student life. Research indicates that effective time management is a cornerstone for success in both academic and extracurricular endeavors. Students who excel in managing their time tend to allocate sufficient attention to their academic obligations while also engaging meaningfully in fraternity activities. Moreover, the ability to set clear goals and deadlines emerges as a critical factor in navigating this balancing act. By establishing concrete objectives and timelines, students can structure their days to accommodate both academic study and fraternity commitments, thereby fostering a sense of equilibrium between these domains.

3.2. Financial Constraints

Financial constraints pose significant challenges for students pursuing higher education, impacting their ability to afford tuition, living expenses, and essential resources. Negotiating these constraints requires innovative solutions and support mechanisms to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities. Participant 1 expresses difficulty in affording big fraternity events due to limited cash resources, relying on savings from their school days. Participant 3 acknowledges feeling guilty about financial constraints but outlines a proactive approach by planning to work at their aunt's store to alleviate the financial burden. Participant 2, a working student, prioritizes education over work obligations, emphasizing the importance of academic pursuits despite financial pressures. Additionally, Participant 4 suggests seeking external sources of financial support such as scholarships and grants to ease the strain of living expenses and tuition. Participant 6 emphasizes the necessity of effective time management to balance coursework and fraternity commitments amidst financial constraints.

A shared statement by the participant:

"I don't always have enough cash for big events in the fraternity. I also save my pocket money from those days in school." (Participant 1)

"As a working student, my priorities are always my education over my work obligations." (Participant 2)

"This has made it tough for me to feel guilty about being in a fraternity. But I have a plan: I'm going to work at my aunt's store to earn some cash." (Participant 3)

"Scholarships, grants, and emergency funds are additional sources of financial support that can relieve the financial strain of living expenses and tuition for individuals who qualify." (Participant 4)

"Financial constraints might put a burden on budgets, managing time effectively is necessary to balance coursework and fraternity functions." (Participant 6)

Many participants express serious concerns about financial challenges (Khanal, 2019). They talk about the fees of joining a fraternity and how careful money management is necessary to be able to pay for both academic expenses and fraternity activities (Zelizer, 2021). This frequently entails taking on part-time work, saving money, and applying for scholarships to lessen the financial load (Perna & Odle, 2020). It takes considerable planning and determination to juggle these financial obligations with commitments to your studies and fraternity. Although

these difficulties, members of the fraternities stay dedicated to them because they cherish the strong sense of brotherhood and personal development they receive (Gibson, 2021).

3.3. Emotional and Social Support

Emotional and social support plays a central role in the well-being and academic success of students, providing a crucial foundation for directing the complexities of university life. Cultivating strong support networks within academic and extracurricular communities fosters resilience, belonging, and a sense of collective responsibility towards individual and collective growth. Participant 1 highlights the familial bond forged among members, grounded in shared values and aspirations. Participant 2 echoes this sentiment, describing the fraternity as a sanctuary where individuals can authentically express themselves without fear of judgment. Participant 3 underscores the importance of the fraternity's comforting presence in instilling confidence during moments of uncertainty, reinforcing a sense of solidarity in facing challenges. Furthermore, Participant 4 emphasizes the fraternity's role as a source of emotional support during difficult times, offering solace and understanding in times of mental illness or personal tragedy. Participant 7 adds another layer by illustrating the fraternity's commitment to communal welfare through participation in philanthropic endeavors, further strengthening bonds and reinforcing the collective sense of purpose. Overall, these responses underscore the multifaceted role of fraternities in providing emotional support, fostering camaraderie, and promoting a sense of belonging and social responsibility among members.

A shared statement by the participant:

"Within the fraternity, members find not just friends but a second family, united by common values and shared goals." (Participant 1)

"I discover a second home, a haven where I can be myself without worrying about being judged." (Participant 2)

"When I'm feeling uncertain, brothers' comforting presence gives me confidence and serves as a reminder that I am not alone in my challenges." (Participant 3)

"The fraternity acts as a network of emotional support, providing a shoulder to cry on in times of mental illness or personal tragedy." (Participant 4)

"We actively participate in worthwhile community projects, like feeding the hungry, to demonstrate our dedication to having a beneficial influence." (Participant 7)

The theme of emotional and social support underlines the vital role that fraternities play in providing a nurturing and supporting environment for their members (Jackson & Iverson, 2019). Participants typically express a strong sense of gratitude for the sense of brothers and camaraderie that the fraternity brings, highlighting the emotional comfort and solidarity they experience inside the fraternity community (Sasso et al., 2019). This tie goes beyond conventional friendship; it is a profound connection based on shared beliefs, experiences, and mutual support (Andalibi & Flood, 2021). Fraternity members find peace and encouragement in knowing that they are part of a close-knit group that stands by them through both successes and tribulations (Jett, 2022).

3.4. Personal Growth and Development

Personal growth and development are integral components of the collegiate experience, fostering self-discovery, resilience, and the acquisition of valuable life skills. Through academic pursuits, extracurricular activities, and interpersonal relationships, students embark on a journey of self-improvement and exploration, shaping their identities and preparing them for future endeavors. Participant 1 emphasizes the foundational role of brotherhood in fostering enduring friendships supported in trust and mutual respect, which contributes significantly to individual growth. Participant 2 elaborates on the diverse activities within the fraternity, such as socializing, fundraising, and community service, which provide opportunities for members to develop leadership skills and broaden their perspectives. However, Participant 2 also acknowledges the challenges faced by working students, where conflicting commitments may arise between fraternity activities and academic or work responsibilities, underscoring the importance of time management and prioritization in personal development. Participant 3 illustrates the determination to balance academic pursuits with fraternity involvement, recognizing the value of education for future success. Finally, Participant 6 underscores the necessity of careful planning and coordination to effectively manage the various demands of extracurricular activities, social engagements, and academic responsibilities, highlighting the proactive approach required for personal growth and development within the fraternity context.

A shared statement by the participant:

"Brotherhood forms the cornerstone of fraternity life, fostering lifelong friendships built on trust, support, and mutual respect." (Participant 1)

"Participating in several events, such as socializing, fundraising, and community service, helps our fraternity and our own personal growth." (Participant 2)

"To help myself, as a working student, even though I didn't agree with it, there are occasions when initiation and pledge activities for new members prevent me from attending school or work." (Participant 2)

"Our attendance shows how much we value each other and the work that goes into planning these gatherings. In the end, being involved in fraternity activities improves our time together as a whole." (Participant 2)

"I was nevertheless determined to finish my schoolwork. I put a lot of effort into my studies and tasks since I knew how important education would be for my future." (Participant 3)

"Encouraging extracurricular activities, social gatherings, and academic responsibilities all need careful planning and coordination on my part." (Participant 6)

Engaging in fraternity activities offers members significant possibilities for personal growth and development (Tull et al., 2020). They typically highlight how these activities develop their leadership talents, create doors for community involvement, and instill a feeling of responsibility and maturity (Morgan et al., 2024). Through involvement in numerous activities and initiatives, fraternity members obtain valuable skills and views that contribute to their overall growth (Sasso et al., 2019). This commitment in fraternity life goes beyond social

exchanges, molding members into well-rounded persons prepared for future challenges and responsibilities (Saravanakumar, 2020).

4. Conclusions

The researchers conclude that effective time management and prioritization skills are crucial for students to successfully navigate the challenges of balancing academic pursuits with fraternity commitments. Addressing financial challenges requires innovative solutions and support mechanisms to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities for all students. Fraternities play a vital role in providing emotional comfort, solidarity, and a sense of belonging to their members, contributing to their overall well-being and academic success. Additionally, fraternity involvement offers members opportunities for leadership development, community engagement, and the acquisition of essential life skills, fostering their holistic growth and preparedness for future endeavors.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended that non-government organizations may prioritize providing financial support mechanisms such as scholarships, grants, and part-time employment opportunities to alleviate the financial burden on students, ensuring equitable access to educational resources. Fraternity organizations may foster inclusive and supportive environments, encouraging strong support networks among members to enhance emotional well-being and academic success. Additionally, universities and fraternity organizations may promote opportunities for leadership development, community engagement, and skill-building activities within fraternity settings to facilitate members' holistic growth and preparation for future endeavors.

Declarations

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare no competing financial, professional, or personal interests.

Consent for publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

All the authors took part in literature review, analysis and manuscript writing equally.

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